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ABSTRACT

Analysis suggests that Korean children use different sentence-ending morphemes to encode different degrees to which they assimilate information into their knowledge system, and that they acquire such epistemic distinctions at a very early age. The study focuses on the occurrence of the modal markers "-ta," "-e," and "-ci," acquired during the first year of language development. The data were derived from a longitudinal study of the spontaneous speech of two monolingual Korean-speaking children. This study represents additional cross-linguistic evidence that speakers are sensitive to, and capable of grammaticizing into their modal system, different levels of status in their knowledge structure. (MSE)

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Pragmatic analysis of Korean modal markers in children's speech*

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There has been a growing interest in analyzing grammatical modal markers from a discourse pragmatic perspective both in child and adult speech (Givon 1984, Aksu-Koc & Slobin 1986). These studies suggest new dimensions of discourse pragmatic functions in tense/aspect and modality markers. Recent cross-linguistic studies show that in many languages tense and modality markers denote various attitudes of the speaker toward the proposition which are related to evidential and epistemic meaning. For example, Akatsuka (1985) argues that conditionals in Japanese denote different degrees of certainty of the proposition in the epistemic scale. Aksu-Koc and Slobin (1986) show that Turkish past tense markers denote different degrees to which the speaker assimilates an event to his/her knowledge system.

Sentence ending (SE) morphemes in Korean informal speech have traditionally been considered as mood markers which distinguish between indicative, interrogative and imperative moods. However, this does not really explain the system of SE morphemes because, as shown in examples 1 through 9 below, some markers can be used in both indicative and interrogative moods, e.g., "-ci", "-e" and "-ya". Furthermore, in each mood category the speaker has a choice among several markers. Forms in sentences 1 through 5 are of the indicative mood. Each of these sentences has a distinct morpheme in the sentence ending position. The same is true for examples 6 through 9 which are in the interrogative mood. The form "-ya" in Sentences 5 and 9 is used only with noun predicates. The discourse function of "-ya" being similar to "-e" which is used only with verb predicates, and since the paper focuses on the events, the acquisition of "-ya" will be discussed only minimally.

Sentence Ending morphemes in Korean informal speech.

Indicative

1. Younghi-ka phyenci-lɨl ssɨ-n-ta 'Y is writing a letter.'
   Y -Sub letter-Ob write-Pres-Ind.
2. Younghi-ka phyenci-lɨl ssɨ-ci " "
3. Younghi-ka phyenci-lɨl ss(ɨ)-e. " "
4. Younghi-ka phyenci-lɨl ssɨ-nɨn-kun. " "
5. i-kes-i Younghi phyenci-ya. 'This is Y's letter.'

Interrogative

6. Younghi-ka phyenci-lɨl ssɨ-ni? 'Is Y writing a letter?'
7. Younghi-ka phyenci-lɨl ss(ɨ)-e? " "
8. Younghi-ka phyenci-lɨl sse-ci? " "
9. i-kes-i Younghi phyenci-ya? 'Is this Y's letter?'

Choi (1929), one of the traditional grammarians, argues that "-ta" is used when the speaker addresses a person who is younger

or lower in social status; "-e" and "-ci", on the other hand, are used when talking to a person equal to the speaker. Recent studies (Lee 1985) investigate the functions of the SE morphemes with a discourse pragmatic analysis and show that they distinguish various degrees to which the speaker assimilates the information to his knowledge system and therefore different degrees of certainty of the proposition.

In this paper, I examine the contexts where SE modal markers occur in two Korean children's speech during their early stages of language acquisition. I will focus on the forms "-ta, -e" and "-ci" which the children acquired during the first year of language development. Based on the study of the contexts of these forms I will argue that children use these morphemes to denote different kinds of epistemic modal meaning. "-ta" denotes information which is new to the child and which has not been assimilated yet into the child's knowledge system, while "-e" and "-ya" denote information which has been assimilated into the child's knowledge system. "-ci" expresses certainty of information which the child assumes to be shared by the listener. The study shows a particular order of acquisition among these morphemes, which I will also discuss in this paper.

The data come from a longitudinal study of the spontaneous speech of two Korean children: the children's speech was recorded once every month from 1;9 (1 year;9 months) till 2;8 for Tongju, and from 1;8 till 2;4 for Polam**. Both children are monolingual Korean speakers. The recording was conducted in the US for Tongju and in Korea for Polam.

The two children first acquired "-ta". This occurred at 1;10 for Tongju and at 1;9 for Polam. The types of contexts and the frequency of the morpheme "-ta" for each type are given in Table 1. Most of the SE morpheme "-ta" occurred in the first three types of context.

1. When describing scenes of a picture book. For example, the children said "kho can-ta" ('he's sleeping') looking at the picture of a baby in bed, "ollakat-ta" ('(he/she's) climbed up') looking at the picture of a child on a tree.

2. When describing events which just happened or are happening in the here and now. For example, "ttele cyet-ta" ('fallen down') when a block fell from the top of a pile. or "nae-ka haet-ta" ('I did it') when finishing a puzzle game.

3. When talking about the existence or non-existence of something in the present: for example, "uyu epta" ('no milk') as the child looks at an empty bottle.

The data show that the events expressed with "-ta" are those which the children visually experience in the here and now, that is, at the moment of speech. "-ta" was rarely used to describe events which were distant from the actual on-going events as shown in Table 1. The morpheme "-ta" seems to be used to encode

events in the present as children become aware of the meaning of the events.

Table 1: Context and frequency of "-ta" and "-e" in the spontaneous speech of two children (Tongju, Polam)

Context	% "-ta"*		% "-e"**	
	T	P	T	P
1. Description of picture	33	28	38	19
2. Description of present event	36	33	3	1
3. about (non-)existence	25	32	4	5
4. make-believe event	3	1	19	10
5. Description of past event	3	6	24	38
6. with abstract predicates	0	0	3	8
7. Request	0	0	11	18
Total	100	100	100	100

* N= 108 (T), 69 (P)
** N= 89 (T), 124 (P)

Let's now turn to the SE morpheme "-e". During the first month when "-ta" became productive, "-e" was used only when requesting something of the adult, and not in describing events. For example, Tongju said "i-ke hae cw-e" ('do this for me') when requesting the caretaker to open a box. The productive use of "-e" for describing events occurred about two months later than that of "-ta" (Tongju- 2;1, Polam- 1;11). The contexts in which "-e" is used are also shown in Table 1. (It should be noted that "-ya" was acquired at the same time as "-e" and was used only with noun predicates with similar function.) The use of the SE morpheme "-e" contrasts with that of "-ta" in the types of events described. "-e" is often used when talking about past events. For example, Polam said "sicang kass-e" ('(I) went to the market') when the caretaker asked her where she had been in the morning. The form is also used when the child pretends that something is true and wants to convince the adult. For example, Tongju said "kkɨtnass-e" ('finished') in the middle of the book when she didn't want to read anymore. Tongju said "eps-e" meaning "gone" as she hid her food behind her back. Polam used the form "-e" when she was playing "doctor" game with her doll. The "-e" form was also used with abstract predicates, e.g., "scary", "dislike". These contexts suggest that the "-e" form is used when the event is already known to the child or when the child creates an event and wants the interlocutor to believe it as true. In contrast with the "-ta" form, then, "-e" seems to express events which are already assimilated to the child's

knowledge system.

However, for Context Type 1, namely, in describing pictures, children used both "-e" and "-ta" substantially. It should be remembered that the "-ta" form was acquired before the "-e" form. During the study period both children were interested in describing similar kinds of events. Examples of the events which they typically enjoyed describing were "ola kat-ta" ('(someone's) climbed up'), "un-ta" ('(someone's) crying'), "tele cyet-ta" ('(something) fell') and "can-ta" ('(someone's) sleeping). During the first couple of months the children used the "-ta" form predominantly when describing these scenes and gradually changed to the "-e" form in describing the same types of scenes. This seems to mean that over the first few months these events have been assimilated to the child's knowledge system, thus changing from "-ta" to "-e".

Another aspect to note is the function of "-ta" and "-e" with respect to interactions with the caretaker. There was a large difference between the frequency of "-ta" and "-e" in the context of dialogue. Table 2 shows that the children used "-e" much more often than "-ta" when exchanging information with the caretaker.

Table 2: Use of "-ta" and "-e" in dialogue with an adult

CHILD	% "-ta"	% "-e"
T	24	48
P	19	57

"-e" is used as response to the caretaker's questions or to continue conversation with the caretaker. As Lee (1985) notes, exchange of information is possible when the information has become part of the speaker's established knowledge system. In contrast to this, "-ta" was used mostly in monologues through which children seem to tell themselves the meaning of an event as they become aware of it. This phenomenon further supports the proposed analysis of "-ta" and "-e". A revealing example of this argument occurs when Polam, finding the balloon which she has been looking for, says "yekit-ta, yekiss-e, yekiss-e". ('Here, here, here'). At the end of the first 'here' the child uses the "-ta" form and for the second and third 'here' she uses the "-e" form. The child uses the "-ta" form first since finding the balloon is unexpected, therefore new information, needing assimilation. Once the information is assimilated the child then can use the morpheme "-e". This sequence of "-ta" followed by "-e" occurred several times in both children's speech. The reverse order did not occur.

Toward the end of the study period the children acquired the SE morpheme "-ci". The function of "-ci" was distinct in that it was used when repeating discourse which the caretaker and child

had engaged in before, or for events which occurred often in the child's everyday life. Some examples are given below. The "-ci" form then was used when the child had already assimilated the information to his/her knowledge system and also assumed that the information was shared by the listener. The use of the "-ci" form thus emphasizes the certainty of the information.

Some contexts of the SE morpheme "-ci"

Context & Caretaker's utterance	Child's utterance
1. Polam (2;1) (pointing to Grandmother's hairpin)	ike hamunikke-ya? 'Is this Grandma's?'
ŧng, hamunikke-ya. 'Yes, Grandma's.'	hammunikke-ci? 'Grandma's, right?'
ŧng, hamunikke-ci. 'Yes, Grandma's'	
2. Polam (2;2) (P remembers seeing a monster on TV.)	
	kweymul an musew-e? 'Monster is not scary?'
kweymul eps-e. '(There's) no monster.'	kweymul TV-eyna it-ci? 'Monsters exist only on TV, right?'
TV sok-eyna it-ci, kweymul eps-e. '(It) only exists on TV, (there's) no monster.'	
3. Tongju (2;8) (T reading Cinderella story with her Daddy. Many times, T has referred to the angel in the story as herself)	
	Tongju chensa 'angel Tongju'
	Tongjunŧn chensa yeki it-ci 'Here is angel Tongju, right?'
yeki iss-e? '(it's) here?'	ŧng. 'yes'

The developmental pattern of these forms was similar in the two children as shown in Table 3. The children first acquired the morpheme "-ta" which describes unassimilated information. Then the children acquired the morpheme "-e" which describes assimilated information, and finally "-ci" which marks the certainty of information. From an interactional perspective, the children first started out uttering information without specifically intending to communicate them with the interlocuter, then moved on to the stage of exchanging information with the interlocutor, and finally to the stage of taking the knowledge of the interlocutor into consideration.

Table 3: Developmental order of SE morphemes

T (1;10), P (1;9)		T (2;1), P (1:11)		T (2;4), P (2;2)
"-ta"	--->	"-e"/"-ya"	--->	"-ci"
unassimilated information	--->	assimilated information	--->	shared information

Table 4: Frequency of SE morphemes in primary Caretaker's speech

CHILD	% "-ta"	% "-e"	% "-ya"	% "-ci"
T	12	59	22	7
P	14	50	19	17

The order of acquisition does not correspond to the degree of frequency of the forms in the caretaker's speech. Table 4 shows that whereas "-e" occurred most frequently, "-ta" occurred only 12 or 14 % of the time in the caretaker's speech. This shows that the early acquisition of "-ta" is not due to the frequency of this form in the caretaker's speech, but rather, due to the child's own system at the particular stage of language development. More precisely, at the initial stage of language acquisition, children encode mostly events of the here and now. Language forms denoting new information should be particularly salient to children at this period. Children seem to be sensitive to and capable of acquiring the forms which particularly express the kinds of information they want to describe even when such forms are not highly frequent in the input.

In this paper, I tried to show that Korean children use different SE forms to encode different degrees to which they assimilate information to their knowledge system. Studies of the modal systems of other languages have reported similar grammatical distinctions. The present study on Korean provides another piece of cross-linguistic evidence that speakers are sensitive to, and capable of grammaticizing into their modal system, different levels of status in their knowledge structure. The present study also shows that children acquire such epistemic distinctions at a very early age.

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